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BLOCKING NEW WARS. By Herbert S. Houston. Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918.

It is, of course, one thing to argue that a commercial boycott would be wise as a measure of retaliation against Germany and quite another to maintain that economic pressure, or the threat of it, might help to prevent wars. In the latter case one has to compare the cost of engaging in commercial warfare with the cost of armed conflict. The comparison, as made by Mr. Herbert S. Houston, results in the conclusion that the grand total of the imports and exports of all the belligerent nations for 1912 falls far below the sum expended by each of these nations for war purposes in a single year. Nor can it be reasonably objected, as Mr. Houston further points out, that the effect of the proposed plan would be heaviest on non-combatants; "for as the less cannot exceed the greater, economic pressure alone, as a preliminary force to prevent war, will never be so hard upon women and children and other non-combatants as economic pressure in time of war."

The plan, Mr. Houston makes plain, has the support of many experienced business men, and so cannot be regarded as a dream of economic theorists or peace enthusiasts. If properly developed, it might lead not only to greater security against international lawlessness, but also to greater convenience in the transaction of business between the citizens of different nations. Both of these purposes would, it seems, be served by the establishment of an international clearing house and an international chamber of commerce.

The real effectiveness of the scheme is what most needs demonstration. As Mr. Houston acknowledges, the contention that if a league of nations pledged to employ economic pressure in the interests of peace had existed before the outbreak of the present war, Austria might have been held in check, is subject to the important qualification, "if Germany had been a member of the league." But, needless to say, Germany, whether she belonged to a league of nations or not, might easily have prevented Austria from going to war. In order to estimate the value of the device, one must consider what its effect would have been upon Germany herself. Germany, no one doubts, had counted the cost and would have taken the plunge in any event.

As has often been pointed out, commercial intercourse does not necessarily mean friendship, nor is mutuality of commercial interests a safeguard against the menace of militarism. The plan of using the threat of commercial warfare as a restraint seems, however, to be a logical part of the programme of the League to Enforce Peace, which is generally regarded as on the whole the most hopeful suggestion that has been made toward preventing war. The commercial boycott would introduce an intermediate stage between the breaking-off of diplomatic relations and the declaration of war. Its application would have the effect of calling the bluff of any bellicose nation, without actually precipitating hostilities.

Although Mr. Houston's treatment of the subject is rather too brief to carry complete conviction, his book is of value as setting forth a carefully formulated programme, argumentatively explained and backed by considerable authority.